

OTHER DISASTERS

**HAZARDOUS MATERIALS, TERRORISM, STRUCTURE FIRES,
POISON OAK, AND RATTLESNAKES**



Hazardous Materials

*If you suspect a hazardous materials incident, follow these important steps and remember **RAIN**.*

Recognize that an incident involving hazardous materials may exist.

Avoid approaching the incident.

Isolate the area to keep others from entering a potentially dangerous area.

Notify authorities (call 911).

Remember to stay uphill, upwind, and upstream from any potential hazardous materials incident.

What is a safe distance? There is no concrete answer to what constitutes a safe distance. It is recommended that you follow the “rule of thumb”: looking toward the incident, hold your thumb out in front of you at arm’s length. If you can still see the incident (e.g., overturned tanker truck) on either side of your thumb, then you are still too close. Continue to back away from the incident until your thumb covers the entire incident.



Poison Oak

Do flood the affected area of your body with lots of cold water as soon as possible. Since the oily resin is only slightly soluble in water, a little water will only spread the poison. Use anti-itch cream. People allergic to poison ivy or poison oak may require medical attention. Consider using pre-exposure lotion, which creates a barrier against poison ivy, oak, and sumac oils. Additionally, poison oak and ivy cleansers are available that can be used up to 8 hours after exposure.

Do not use hot water or soap or scrub the affected area, as this will increase the effects of poison ivy and poison oak.

Rattlesnakes are the only reptiles in Southern California considered dangerous to humans, but they're also commonplace and most active during the spring and summer months. Many different species of snakes often sun themselves on ledges during the daytime, or hide in warm areas such as underneath logs or rocks, in trash piles, or inside animal burrows.

Should you encounter a snake, here are some ways to ensure your safety:

- If you see a snake, leave it alone. Even a dead snake's reflexes make it capable of biting. If the



snake is on your property, call the proper animal control agency to have it removed.

- Do not pick items from a wood or trash pile with your bare hands. Instead, remove items using a long stick or rake.

Should you or a member of your group be bitten by a snake, here's what you should do:

- Immediately pull the bite victim away from the snake.
- Call 911 as soon as possible. If you can't find or use a phone immediately, get the victim to the nearest hospital or clinic.
- Immobilize the bitten area and keep it lower than the victim's heart. If the bite is on a hand or arm, remove all jewelry or tight clothing. Keep the victim as still as possible.
- If a snake bites your cat or dog, keep the animal calm and immediately take it to a veterinarian who, you are certain, keeps antivenin in stock for treatment.

DO NOT DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Do not apply a tourniquet. • Do not suck out the venom.
- Do not cut into the bite area.
 - Do not apply heat or ice to the bite.
- Do not give the victim caffeine, alcohol, or any medication.

If you have a rattlesnake that is a problem...

1. CALL FIRE STATION 69 AT 310-455-1766.

They will come to help you, but official department policy dictates that they must kill the snake.

2. CALL THE DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL AT 818-991-0071.

They will come out to relocate the snake.

Rattlesnakes!

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T O P A N G A

93

STATION 69



Fire Station 69 responds to approximately 450 calls annually, ranging from fires to emergency medical services, public assistance, and false alarms.



The station is staffed by four firefighters, three of whom are assigned to Engine 69; the fourth firefighter mans Patrol 69. Fire Station 69 is also home to Engine 269, which is staffed by call firefighters. These call firefighters (generally Topanga residents) are on call and are dispatched via a paging system. They respond with Engine 69 to any major incident in the jurisdiction. Fire Station 69 is one of only ten fire stations in the County to utilize the Call Firefighter Program. Station 69 firefighters also become brush inspectors before each fire season. Every property in Topanga is inspected and notices are left identifying further steps property owners must take to come into compliance with brush clearance rules. Your local inspector will meet with you individually at your request to discuss proper clearance. Call 310-455-1766 to set up an appointment.

IMPORTANT

**PLEASE
DO NOT CALL
STATION 69 TO
REPORT
AN EMERGENCY—
CALL 911!**

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Remember, defensible space can save lives and property!

TOPANGA FIRE STATISTICS FOR 2001 THROUGH 2004:

**STRUCTURE FIRES.....31
VEHICLE FIRES.....18
BRUSHFIRES.....11
TOTAL ACRES BURNED.....7**

www.topangasurvival.org

SURVIVAL QUIZ

**DO YOU KNOW WHY
FIRE STATION NO. 69,
LOCATED IN THE
CENTER OF TOWN IN
PACIFIC PALISADES,
HAS THE
SAME NUMBER?**

ANSWER:

**ITS A FACT...THEY BOTH
HAVE THE SAME NUMBER—
BUT THE PALISADES STATION
IS A LOS ANGELES
CITY STATION, WHILE THE
TOPANGA STATION IS PART OF
LOS ANGELES COUNTY.**

Everyday Parking Issues

The population growth in Topanga Canyon and the multiple vehicle ownership of virtually all Canyon residents, the relative narrowness of most Canyon roads, and the popularity of SUVs and large pickup trucks have all contributed to serious parking and related safety issues throughout Topanga. Los Angeles County Fire Department regulations call for three vehicles to respond to all calls: a fire engine, a patrol truck, and an EMS vehicle. Even the smallest response truck from Topanga's Station 69 needs at least twelve feet of clearance to negotiate Canyon roadways. Seconds count and response time is critical in most emergency situations: clogged bottlenecks, with vehicles parked on both sides of a street, preventing ingress by fire trucks and emergency crews, may result in tragic consequences in a life-and-death situation. Topangans need to be cognizant of the ramifications when a guest or tenant poorly parks a car or truck in the middle of the street or directly across the street from another vehicle, or when a party creates a dense logjam of cars and trucks, effectively risking the lives of all those down the road. Canyon residents should be aware of the following:

- 1. Vehicles may park in one spot on a street for a period of only 72 consecutive hours, after which they can be ticketed and towed.**
- 2. There must be 15 feet of road clearance, in both directions, from fire hydrants and intersections.**
- 3. Cul-de-sacs need to be kept clear of vehicles and other hindrances to leave enough room for emergency vehicles to turn around.**
- 4. Vehicles must park within 18 inches of the side of the road—i.e., as close as possible on the passenger side. Vehicles should not park facing the wrong direction and may be ticketed and towed if they do so.**

5. You are encouraged to coordinate with your neighbors to voluntarily limit parking to one side of the road, especially on the narrowest streets, to allow for 15 feet of clearance and eliminate the need for emergency vehicles to “slalom” down a street. If access remains a problem, contact the L.A. County Department of Public Works to request appropriate parking restrictions. NOTE: The California Highway Patrol, Sheriff’s Department, or Fire Department will also request that Public Works place parking restrictions as appropriate.

6. There is a 27-hour window for trash cans to be left on a street, starting no earlier than 5:00 P.M. on the day before trash day and no later than 8:00 P.M. the day of trash pickup. The rest of the time trash cans have to be off the street. Residents should note that large trash cans create a hazard for emergency personnel because they have to maneuver around them in situations where seconds often count.

7. County zoning codes state that all residents must provide off-street parking for any vehicles connected to their homes, which includes tenant vehicles. Therefore, you need to provide off-street parking for everyone living on the property, and street parking should be reserved for visitors, not residents.

8. In L.A. County there are several differing enforcement codes that deal with parking and the unencumbered width of the roadway. Please keep in mind that the newest and most prevalent fire engines in the L.A. County fleet are at least 9 1/2 feet wide, and the largest fire engines are 10 1/2 feet wide. During an incident, firefighters typically work off the sides of the fire truck, so vehicles and crew generally need at least 15 feet of unencumbered roadway. That means no vegetation, cars, or trash cans in the way of the fire engines and firefighters. Ultimately, it would not be an exaggeration to say that mindful and considerate parking practices may save the lives of your family and your neighbor’s. In addition, cars parked in such a way as to block this critical access can be ticketed or towed by the CHP or Sheriff’s Department.

Terrorist Threat Levels



1. GREEN

Low risk of an attack occurring exists. Routine security measures should be employed.

INDIVIDUAL'S RESPONSE: *Develop a personal disaster plan and amass a disaster supply kit.*

2. BLUE

General risk of an attack exists. There are no credible, specific threats. Government agencies, local law enforcement, and impacted companies are asked to review emergency response plans and update if necessary.

Individual's Response: *Be alert to suspicious activity and report it to your local police or workplace security; review your disaster supply kit and replace any outdated items; develop an emergency communications plan; review your children's school emergency plan; establish an alternate meeting place away from home.*

3. YELLOW

Significant risk of an attack exists. Government agencies and local law enforcement are asked to increase surveillance at critical locations, coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions, and reassess preplanned measures in light of current threats.

INDIVIDUAL'S RESPONSE: *Be alert to suspicious activity and report it to your local police or workplace security; review your disaster supply kit and replace any outdated items; develop an emergency communications plan; review your children's school emergency plan; establish an alternate meeting place away from home.*

4. ORANGE

High risk of an attack occurring exists. There are credible threats but no specific target identified. Increase security at critical facilities and locations. A security force of combined federal, state, and local law enforcement coordinates with the military.

INDIVIDUAL'S RESPONSE: *See "Elevated" section, plus exercise caution when traveling; practice your family's communication plan; discuss children's fears concerning possible terrorist attacks; stay calm and be prepared to donate blood if the need is announced.*

5. RED

Severe risk of attack occurring or an attack has already occurred. A credible, specific threat to a facility or location may be declared. This level may require deployment of specialized teams, closing of government and public facilities, and monitoring of transportation systems.

INDIVIDUAL'S RESPONSE: *See "High" section, plus listen to the radio or TV for current information and/or instructions; contact your business or school to determine the status of work or school for that day; adhere to any travel restrictions announced by local authorities; be prepared to shelter in place or evacuate if instructed to do so by authorities.*

Structure Fires

Structure fires can happen at any time. Homes have been known to burn down in the winter. Response time is critical, so Topangans need to make sure emergency vehicles can get through on narrow streets every day of the year.

Photo: Courtesy of Topanga Messenger

SURVIVOR'S STORY

POST OFFICE TRACT STRUCTURE FIRE



**JANE MARLA
ROBBINS**

It's been over five years since the fire that burned down the house I was renting in Topanga, five years since I was asleep in bed and heard the seven a.m.. knock on my door when my neighbor, also my landlord, yelled, "Get out of the house, it's on fire! Go out the back door!"

But it was Topanga. I never knew which door was the front door and which was the back. I jumped out of bed and I ran up the three stairs to the landing. Luckily I'd gone to sleep in my terry cloth robe.

I looked to the right, towards the sliding glass doors to the deck. Surely that was the "back door." But I stopped at a wall of smoke. So I turned left, to what I'd always thought of as the front door. I opened it and stepped into the daylight.

My landlord was there and advised me to get in my car. Luckily the keys were in it. I lived in Topanga: people leave their doors open in Topanga; we feel safe here. Except maybe from fires.

I had my car and a bathrobe. That was it. And from the top of the driveway above the house, along with twenty-five of my closest neighbors, I watched the house burn. We all knew it was nothing short of a miracle that there wasn't even the breath of a breeze out that morning, or else much of Topanga State Park, and a lot of the neighboring houses, would surely have burned to the ground.

When Your House Burns Down

The firemen got there too late to save the house; but they could tell from what was left that the fire had started inside a wall. Mainly, I was alive, if in some sort of a trance. And I would be lying if I told you I got over it quickly. Would you believe a couple of years.

After the fire, a lot of people came up to me joking that it had been a great way for me to clean house. That was probably easier for them to say than to feel "O my God, it could have been me."

A lot of people reassured me that I'd rise phoenix-like from the ashes. But I didn't feel like any bird out of some Greek myth. I also understood that talking about a phoenix was probably easier for them than feeling "O my God, it could have been me."

Did I have reruns? Yes. Was it fun being terrified by a microwave buzzer, thinking it was a smoke alarm? No. Was my ancient optimism shattered by the new and obvious realization that I could never know if or when a catastrophe would strike? Yes. Pollyanna was dead.

But five years later, have I built a new life? YES.

"I look back at the clothing and dishes I was given, at the houses were I stayed, and I think that it probably takes a village to make a phoenix."

You're reading these words; I'm obviously still a writer, even though my computer and some old scripts burned in the fire. And I'm living in a new house not made of quick-burning wood, like the last one, but one covered in aluminum siding, a fire retardant, if an uncommon sight in Topanga. And I feel safer knowing it isn't quick tinder.

Of course I would have preferred a leisurely throwing out of the books and photos I didn't want. But what's gone is gone. I've mourned, and sure enough, I've got new files, new photos, new scripts and papers, many of which I'm surprised and embarrassed to admit I do now need to throw out.

My closet has much of my "Fire Wardrobe"-- the skirts, blouses, pants and sweaters that so many people in the community collected to give me. A lot of them actually fit, and I've kept a lot of them because I'm still touched that people cared enough to think of me, and to help.

I've also kept the four dinner plates which a family of total strangers delivered to wherever it was I was living. Ten people had offered me their homes and I actually stayed in five different places in Topanga before I found an apartment

to rent: owned, perfectly enough, by a fireman. Never mind that almost as soon as I moved in he confided he recently forgot to turn off his stove, and actually started a small fire.

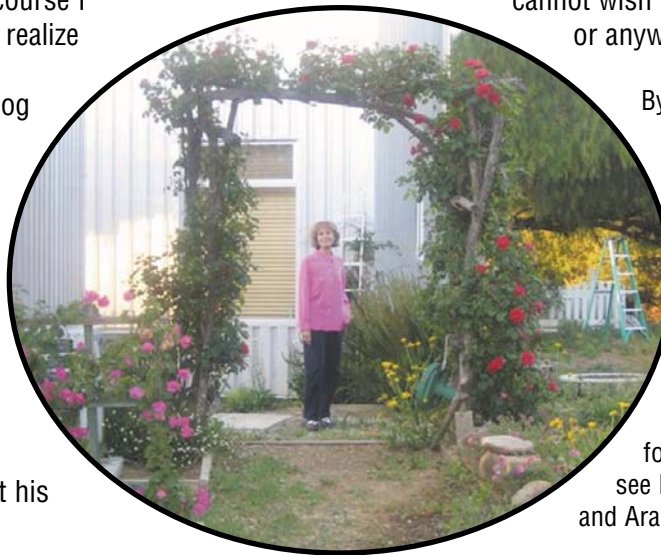
I look back at the clothing and dishes I was given, at the houses where I stayed, and I think that it probably takes a village to make a phoenix. So of course I haven't left Topanga, even though I realize that fire comes with the territory.

I remember the big black dog that visited me in the apartment I rented after the fire. It was mainly with this dog that I mourned the burning of my house and the destruction of my "things." I learned that Escalapius, the Greek god of healing, was known to travel to earth in the shape of a dog. My medicine was to dance with the dog, the dance of denial, anger, grief and acceptance, against his strong, tough body.

Five years later I have a new house; its aluminum shines in the sunlight; and I have my own dog, a little white one whose coat is actually iridescent. So I did come through the darkness and into the light, and out of the ashes into some sort of flight, like a phoenix. But in all conscience I cannot wish this dance for anyone in Topanga or anywhere else.

By Jane Marla Robbins

Jane Marla Robbins, actress, writer, coach, is the author of *Acting Techniques for Everyday Life: Look and Feel Self-Confident In Difficult Real Life Situations*, based on her teaching. The Kennedy Center commissioned her to write and perform the one-woman play, *"REMINISCENCES OF MOZART BY HIS SISTER"*, which she also performed at Lincoln Center; and you can see her in the movies *Rocky I, II and V*, and *Arachnophobia*.



***Three years after Jane's rental house burned,
she bought one of her own, also in Topanga. Its exterior is aluminum.***